

In the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A ceramic packing element comprising an essentially uniform cross-section along an axis passing through a center of the element and about which the element is symmetrical defining a length of the element a ratio of a width dimension to the length being from 1.5:1 to 5:1, and first and second concave external surfaces at the ends of height and width axes respectively perpendicular to the length direction, said concave surfaces being connected by surfaces that are selected from convex surfaces and convex surfaces connected to the concave surfaces by relatively short intermediate flat surfaces, and the element being provided with at least three through passages in the length direction, at least one of the passageways being kidney bean-shaped in cross-section, the kidney-bean shaped passageway having two generally parallel arcuate surfaces, wherein said element further comprises a plurality of second passages having a second shape, the at least one kidney bean-shaped passage being positioned intermediate at least one of the plurality of second of passages and the center of the element.
2. (Previously Presented) An element according to claim 1 in which the concave surfaces are connected directly to convex surfaces.
3. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 1 or 2 in which width and height dimensions of the element are unequal with the ratio of width to height being from 1.25:1 to 3:1.
4. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 3 in which width and height dimensions of the element are in a ratio of from about 1.3:1 to 2.0:1.
5. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 1 in which the element is provided with from 3 to 275 passageways.

6. (Currently Amended) An element according to Claim 1 in which at least a plurality of the passageways are round in cross-section and a diameter of each round passage is less than about one half of the height of the element.
7. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 6 in which the plurality of passageways have identical dimensions.
8. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 1 in which the at least one kidney bean-shaped passageway has a largest dimension which is up to about 2/3 of the height of the element.
9. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 1 in which a total cross-sectional area of the passages represents from 20 to 75% of the total cross-sectional area of the element.
10. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 9 in which a total cross-sectional area of the passages represents from 30 to 67% of the total cross-sectional area of the element.
11. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 1 in which the ceramic is a porous material.
12. (Canceled)
13. (Currently Amended) An element according to Claim 1 in which a ratio of height to length width of the element, H:L is from about 5:1 to 15:1.
14. (Previously Presented) An element according to Claim 13 in which H:L is about 8:1.
15. (Withdrawn) A method of forming a bed of packing elements comprising:

extruding a mixture comprising one or more ceramic-forming components; sectioning the extruded mixture to form sections; firing the sections to form packing elements, wherein each of the packing elements is characterized by first and second concave external surfaces at the ends of height and width axes respectively perpendicular to a length direction, said concave surfaces being connected by surfaces that are selected from convex surfaces and convex surfaces connected to the concave surfaces by relatively short intermediate flat surfaces, a ratio of a width dimension to the length being from 1.5:1 to 5:1, and the element being provided with at least three through passages in the length direction, at least one of the passageways being kidney bean-shaped in cross-section, the kidney-bean shaped passageway having two generally parallel arcuate surfaces; assembling a bed of packing elements which includes a plurality of the fired packing elements.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Canceled)

18. (Canceled)

19. (Canceled)

20. (Canceled)

21. (Canceled)

22. (Canceled)

23. (Canceled)

24. (Canceled)

25. (Canceled)

26. (Canceled)

27. (Withdrawn) An element according to Claim 23 in which the passageways have identical dimensions.

28. (Withdrawn) A ceramic packing element having an essentially uniform cross-section along an axis passing through the center of the element and about which the element is symmetrical defining the length of the element and first and second pairs of opposed concave external surfaces which extend along the length of the element at intersections of mutually perpendicular height and width axes, the height and width axes being perpendicular to the length direction, said concave surfaces being connected by surfaces that are selected from convex surfaces and convex surfaces connected to the concave surfaces by relatively short intermediate flat surfaces, and the element being provided with at least three through passages in the length direction, the three passageways being round in cross-section and the diameter of each being less than one half of the height of the element, wherein width and height dimensions of the element are unequal.

29. (Canceled)

30. (Canceled)